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RELIGIOUS HISTORY, DISPLACED BY MODERNITY

HANS G. KIPPENBERG

The vanishing of 'history' from religious studies

Religious studies are flourishing again. Fifty years ago most scholars were convinced that religions definitely belonged to the past and were of interest only to a tiny group of specialists. Today religious studies are pursued by a host of people in a range of departments. Because of the relevance of cultural issues to the contemporary world, religions have moved from the periphery to the very center of public and academic concern. Their startling resurgence has given rise to a growing number of studies that explore this phenomenon in fresh, new ways. Among the many publications that have appeared recently, I would like to draw attention to a volume edited by Mark C. Taylor, which appeared in 1998. Entitled *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*,[1] it describes the field in terms of 22 notions — some of them old acquaintances, others newcomers — from 'belief' to 'writing'. Each article analyses the theoretical value of one of these notions, examining it "in a particular religious tradition."[2] Another volume, which appeared recently and which is entitled *Guide to the Study of Religion*[3] likewise explores such notions as 'classification', 'comparison', and 'gender' — 31 notions in all. Examining the concepts in the two volumes, I was struck by the absence of both 'history' and 'tradition' from each; ironically, only 'modernity' has survived. As it happens, though, the essay on 'modernity' by Gustavo Benavides in *Critical Terms* is not a bad substitute for the two 'missing' essays.[4] Benavides conceives of

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[1] Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago/London 1998.

[2] *Critical Terms* p. 18.

[3] Willi Braun/Russell T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Guide to the Study of Religion*. London/New York 2000.

[4] "Modernity," in Taylor, *Critical Terms* pp. 186-204.

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modernity as a self-conscious distancing from the past — a break different in the domain of knowledge than in the domain of morality or aesthetics. Since modern reflexivity is self-referential, the separation of these domains has not led to the disappearance of religions altogether, but to their "reflexive ordering and reordering" (G. Benavides).[5] (This, sadly, would have been a perfect point of departure for an essay on the 'history' or 'traditions' of religions!)

In his preface to *Critical Terms*, Taylor argues for a position that makes the lacuna plausible: 'religion' is not a universal phenomenon, but rather the product of a complex Western history. He refers to Jonathan Z. Smith's essay 'Religion', which also appears in this volume. The essay is particularly valuable, since J.Z. Smith elaborates in it on his provocative sentence: "there is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study."[6] Smith's essay in *Critical Terms* traces, step by step, how the use and understanding of the Western term 'religion' has been expanding since the sixteenth century, and also how it became a category imposed from the outside on native cultures, and claimed as something universal and natural to everybody.[7] This observation of Smith's and Taylor's is in line with a major issue in historical studies today: the break between facts and words and between the past and the present. A dilemma haunting anthropologists[8] and historians haunts students of religions too: namely, that evidence cannot be clearly be distinguished from representation. Taylor conceives of the issue in terms of 'invention': "Far from existing prior to and independent of any inquiry, the very phenomenon of religion is constituted by local discursive practices. The investigators create — sometimes unknowingly — the objects and

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[5] *Critical Terms* p. 189.

[6] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion. From Babylon to Jonestown.* Chicago/London 1982, p. XI.

[7] *Critical Terms* p. 269.

[8] Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives. The Anthropologist as Author.* Cambridge 1988; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art.* Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1988, cf. in particular "On ethnographic authority" pp. 21-54.

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truths they profess to discover. Some critics claim that appearances to the contrary withstanding, religion is a *modern Western invention*."[9]

Imagining religious history

But is this a reasonable conclusion? I think that there is a flaw in the argument. Taylor confuses the issue of historical imagination with that of fiction. If one ignores that distinction, there is no need anymore for notions like 'history' or 'tradition', indicating a past effecting the present. If the referent is not only represented but even replaced by historiography, historians are presenting fictions in the guise of facts. As a consequence 'history' and 'tradition' do not belong to the basic critical terms in religious studies. The question is: What are we loosing and what are we gaining by doing so? In answering it I first would like to explain why the distinction is basic to any theory of history. It is obvious for everybody reading or writing history that the representation of past data cannot be easily distinguished from imagination or fiction. Where exactly runs the line between them? That dilemma has fuelled reflections on historiography since the 19th century. The complex and rich debate quickly has turned into the fundamental issue of the validity of any historical knowledge in comparison particularly with natural sciences. Instead of going into all the details I restrict myself to short comments on the issues of the evidence and of imagination, backed by two recent authors. The first point concerns the status of historical sources. There is a wide

[9] *Critical Terms* p. 7. Taylor's position seems to me confusing as regards the status of theory: either theories of the scholars refer to the same data (and compete in explaining them) or they constitute different data (and describe them from different angles). These two possibilities clearly need to be distinguished. In the first case, theories are competing explanations of the same data, while in the second they are complementary perspectives on the same data. The difference is nicely explained in a sharp letter by Robert A. Segal to the editor of *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (1999) pp. 75-76. That the plurality of definitions, current in religious studies, should be regarded as case of pragmatics, is the common denominator in Jan G. Platvoet/Arie L. Molendijk (eds.), *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion. Contexts, Concepts and Contests*. Leiden 1999.

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agreement, that evidence is not natural. When a historian refers to a 'fact', he or she does not refer to something natural or even evident. The 'fact' too has to be conceived. That happens along different lines, as a recent debate has demonstrated again. Hayden White conceived of a 'fact' as the outcome of a process turning unstructured 'events' into a narration. The narrative genre functions like a protocol processing data. Its rhetorical means metapher, metonymy, synekdoche and irony are establishing these 'facts'. Evidence is not natural, but constituted according to elementary narrative forms. The imagination of the historian and the structure of evidence belong together.[10] Paul Ricoeur rejected this concept of facts, because of its privileging the narrative form. According to him the historian breaks with the level of narration. The historical operation consists of three interrelated but independent steps: selecting and studying documents as witnesses of past events, explaining actions generating these events, conceiving of a text. The fundamental difference compared with Hayden White are the notions of action and of time.[11] This debate is only one among others. Whether one follows White or Ricoeur or somebody else: The need for an explication of what is meant by 'fact' is inevitable, since it is part and parcel of the historical operation. No scholar of religions can or should avoid it.

A second assumption has to do with the subjective concern of the historian that informs his choice of documents, his construction of facts and his text. This activity is a kind of transcendental category in historiography that cannot be removed. Since facts exist only due to the meanings attributed to them, historical interpretation is firmly connected with them. What we need are methods for a critical

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[10] Hayden White, "Figuring the Nature of the Times Deceased: Literary Theory and Historical Writing," in: Ralph Cohen (ed.), *The Future of Literary History*. New York/London 1989. German translation: "Literaturtheorie und Geschichtsschreibung," in: Herta Nagl-Docekal (ed.), *Der Sinn des Historischen. Geschichtsphilosophische Debatten*. Frankfurt 1996, pp. 67-106.

[11] Paul Ricoeur, "Histoire et rhétorique," in: *Diogène* 168 (1994), pp. 1-18. German translation "Geschichte und Rhetorik," in: Herta Nagl-Docekal *Der Sinn des Historischen* pp. 107-125.

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evaluation of them. Among them comparison in particular is yielding. A comparison of the texts of historians reveals that their perceptions of the past depend on their attitudes to the present. Historians in describing past facts do more than chronicle them: they turn these facts into something worth remembering, attribute significance to them.[12] Notions like 'nation', 'class' and 'religion' likewise transform historical data into concepts relevant to the contemporary world of the scholars. In my book *Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte. Religionswissenschaft und Moderne*[13] I have used this point of view in order to demonstrate that the study of past religions by 'classical' scholars of religions has been informed by their experience of the rise of the modern world. Imagining past religions is not necessarily arbitrary. To the contrary: it can be an important source revealing how scholars and their audience reacted to the passing away of traditions and to the challenges of modernity. Brute facts about the past are read as containing experiences, relevant to present expectations.[14] The meaning historians attribute to them is open to an examination of the evidence. There is no other way to distinguish imagination from fiction except in terms of their different epistemological status in the face of historical evidence.

Behind the issue looms a larger one: that the expectation of a vanishing of religions from the modern world has failed. The idea of

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[12] Jörn Rüsen, *Historische Vernunft. Grundzüge einer Historik* I: *Die Grundlagen der Geschichtswissenschaft*. Göttingen 1983 chapter 2: "Pragmatik — Die lebenspraktische Konstitution des historischen Denkens"; cf. Klaus E. Müller/Jörn Rüsen (ed.), *Historische Sinnbildung. Problemstellungen, Zeitkonzepte, Wahrnehmungshorizonte, Darstellungsstrategien*. Reinbek 1997.

[13] München 1997. An English translation will appear with Princeton University in 2001.

[14] The issue has been clearly detailed by Reinhard Koselleck, " 'Erfahrungsraum' und 'Erwartungshorizont' — zwei historische Kategorien." Idem, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*. Frankfurt/M. 1979, pp. 349-375. Cf. Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*. London/New York 1991 pp. 27-57, and Chris Lorenz, *Konstruktion der Vergangenheit. Eine Einführung in die Geschichtstheorie*. Köln/Weimar/Wien 1997, pp. 177-187.

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progress that supported that expectation gave way to an epistemology of history. The German sociologist Georg Simmel explained this well in a book about the philosophy of history. Referring to Kant, he pointed out that according to Kant nature is a pervasive power for mankind. Kant's critical epistemology turned that inconceivable power into categories of the human mind; Simmel wanted to do the same with history.[15] We deserve a critical reflection on history, in order to turn the tacit power of history into concepts of the human mind. I think that Simmel's idea helps to clarify the issue. Simmel and others assumed religion as a lasting power in the modern world. Isn't it naive to think of religions as deserving our recognition because of their wonderful expression of cultural difference and personal identity? There is sufficient reason to believe that people can be trapped in religious traditions just as they are trapped in natural laws, unable to escape from either. It appears that 'history' and 'tradition' are most crucial and relevant terms in religious studies today. Without them we never will be able to conceive of modernity as "a reflexive ordering and reordering of religions", to quote Benavides. Though referring to the revival of 'religious tradition', Mark Taylor excluded even 'tradition' from his 'critical terms'. But if modernity involves a continuation of the past as well as a break with it, as the rise of the notion itself indicates,[16] we need to know the past in order to know the present. In the words of Dilthey: "What man is, only history tells him."

A debate in 1910 among social scientists about the lasting power of religions

Is the present scholarly generation really the first that senses the power of religious traditions? Mark Taylor appears to think so, judging from these words: "A century that began with modernism sweeping

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[15] Georg Simmel, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie* (1907), ed. by Guy Oakes/Kurt Röttgers. Georg Simmel, Gesamtausgabe. Vol. 9, Frankfurt/M. 1997, pp. 229-230.

[16] Hans Robert Jauss, "Antiqui/moderni (Querelle des Anciens et Modernes)." In: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Bd.1. Darmstadt 1971, pp. 410-414.

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across Europe is ending with a remarkable resurgence of religious beliefs and practices throughout the world."[17] However, we only have to return to the first meeting of German sociologists in Frankfurt in 1910 to see the situation then as very different from the one that Taylor suggests. On 21 October 1910, the church historian Ernst Troeltsch gave a paper on "Stoic-Christian Natural Law and Modern Secular Natural Law."[18] It elicited such an intense debate — in which Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Ferdinand Tönnies, Eberhard Gothein, Martin Buber, and Ernst Kantorowicz participated — that the minutes of the meeting were published as well.[19]

Some of the scholars attending were convinced that modern phenomena such as 'capitalism' and 'individualism' could not be understood in terms of their modern function alone. The ethos of hard work or the notion of human rights, necessary for the functioning of modern institutions, had their roots in a particular Western cultural history, to which Judaism, Hellenism, Roman culture, and Christianity had made fundamental contributions. It was this conviction that heightened scholarly interest even in highly specialized areas of religious history. Max Weber appears to be alluding to that conviction when he writes at the end of his famous essay "The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism" (1904-5): "The modern man is in general, even with the best will, unable to give religious ideas a significance for culture and national character which they deserve."[20] The social scientist knew better: despite the modernity of economic or legal institutions, the mentality informing them was something different entirely.

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[17] *Critical Terms* p. 1.

[18] Ernst Troeltsch, "Das stoisch-christliche Naturrecht und das moderne profane Naturrecht," in: *Verhandlungen des Ersten Deutschen Soziologentages vom 19.-22. Oktober 1910 in Frankfurt a. M.* Tübingen 1911 pp. 166-192. The paper was published separately in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 106 (1911) pp. 237-267.

[19] The minutes are published in *Verhandlungen des Ersten Deutschen Soziologentages* pp. 192-214.

[20] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* Translated by Talcott Parsons (1930). London/New York 1997, p. 183.

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Troeltsch had devoted many years to this issue in his research. In a well-known article on "The Significance of Protestantism for the Rise of the Modern World,"[21] he argued that the modern world was a continuation of the pre-modern one particularly with respect to individualism — which, far from being the outcome of an emancipation from tradition, had religious roots. Ideas can remain powerful, even if contested seriously.[22] The paper that he gave in 1910 addressed the puzzling fact that Christianity had been institutionalised by three distinct social forms: the 'church' that administered the sacraments, the 'sect' as a community of true and serious believers, and finally 'mysticism' as a radical form of individualism. Each of these social forms established a distinct guiding principle for dealing with the natural laws of the world. The 'church' regarded these natural laws as necessarily different from the perfect law of Christ, and did not expect the laity to act according the latter law. The 'sect', in contrast, recognised one law only, that of unconditional brotherliness, and created a fundamental tension between the perfect believer and the natural world. And finally, 'mysticism', which took the divine light to be inside the believer, established an individualism independent of any community and justified an indifference to the external world, religious institutions included. According to Troeltsch, then, these three social forms represented three different concepts of a Christian attitude to the world and its laws, all three forms being genuinely Christian.

Troeltsch's paper though highly specialised hit a crucial point, as the debate shows. The minutes (which, as I already noted, were published together with the lecture) give unique access to the concerns of many of the period's major intellectual figures, searching for the roots of the mental conditions operative in the modern world. Georg

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[21] "Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt." *Historische Zeitschrift* 97 (1906) pp. 1-66. Later published separately in revised form as *Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt.* München/Berlin 1911.

[22] "Die heutige Welt lebt so wenig wie irgendeine andere von der Konsequenz; geistige Mächte können herrschen, auch wenn man sie bestreitet" (*Bedeutung des Protestantismus* 1911, p. 22).

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Simmel, who had published a book on religion in 1906,[23] raised doubts that Christianity had any social significance at all, given that it recognised one problem only: the soul and its relation to god.[24] Demanding brotherly love, it transposed this demand from the real world to the domain of the soul and its god alone. The attitude to the world was accordingly one of indifference.[25] Martin Buber, too, pointed out in the debate that mysticism was not a social category at all, but only a psychological one, which denied the value of any community. A year earlier, Buber had, with Eugen Diederichs, edited *Ekstatische Konfessionen*, a collection of confessions of mystics. In his preface to this volume, he had interpreted the experiences that lay behind these documents as those of witnessing something essential in human life, which transcended rationality.[26] Contemporary man, on this understanding of life, is misrepresented by modern institutions and cut off from realising the potential of his own self. In contemplating historical documents, he is able, at least, to recognise this gap.[27]

Max Weber also took the floor. Five years earlier, he had traced the rise of capitalism to Puritan Protestantism. A market economy required an ethos different from that required by a traditional economy. Puritan sects had played a role in bringing about the necessary transformation: they had instructed their members to seek salvation not by relying on sacraments, but by working hard and abstaining from pleasures. People who transformed that attitude into practice contributed (inadvertently or not) to the rise of a market economy. But their suc-

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[23] Georg Simmel, *Die Religion*. Frankfurt/M., 1906.

[24] *Verhandlungen* p. 204.

[25] *Verhandlungen* p. 205. According to Volkhard Krech Simmel has been stimulated by the vitalist discussion on mysticism. *Georg Simmels Religionstheorie.* Tübingen 1998, p. 210.

[26] M. Buber (ed.) *Ekstatische Konfessionen* (1909) München, 2. ed. 1994 by Peter Sloterdijk. "Zuerst scheint der Mensch mit dem Namen Gottes vornehmlich das erklärt zu haben, was er an der Welt nicht verstand, dann aber immer öfter das, was der Mensch an sich nicht verstand. So wurde die Ekstase — das, was der Mensch an sich am wenigsten verstehen konnte — zu Gottes höchster Gabe" (p. 55).

[27] *Verhandlungen* pp. 206-7.

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cess had a high price: it turned personal conviction into an iron law. "The Puritans wanted to work toward a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order." The Puritan ethos became an "iron cage".[28] His own research led Weber to reject Troeltsch's thesis that only the church, and not the sects, could establish Christianity as a truly popular religion.[29] The case of the United States, Weber argued, leads to the opposite conclusion: exclusivity did not prevent sects from becoming popular. The United States were (and are) "the most religious country", in terms not only of quantity of adherents, but also of devoutness. But there "Christianity had (and has) for the most part adopted the form of sects:" "It is precisely because religion has, in fact, taken the form of the sect that religion has become so popular."[30] Weber also addressed the issue of mysticism, and defended against Buber's critique the claim of Troeltsch that mysticism is a genuine social form of Christianity. This has been shown, for example, in the impact that the Orthodox church has had on Russian philosophy and literature, and in the fact that even the rise of Russian agrarian communism can be traced to the Orthodox church. Religious history explains the mind behind modern practices.

That Mark Taylor is not familiar with these debates is perhaps not his own fault, and has a great deal to do with the history of our discipline. After the First World War, anti-historicism spread in religious studies, severing for decades the link between the study of religions and that of modern institutions. To see this intellectual shift,

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[28] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* p. 181.

[29] "Das stoisch-christliche Naturrecht und das moderne profane Naturrecht" p. 175.

[30] "Gerade, weil der religiöse Typus dort faktisch der Sektentypus ist, ist die Religion dort Volkssache, und weil dieser Sektentypus nicht universal, sondern exklusiv ist, und weil exklusiv, seinen Anhängern innerlich und äußerlich ganz bestimmte Vorzüge bietet, darum ist dort die Stätte des Universalismus der effektiven Zugehörigkeit zu religiösen Gemeinschaften" (*Verhandlungen* p. 201; reprinted in M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik*. Tübingen 1924, pp. 468-469).

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one need only compare articles in consecutive editions of *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (*RGG*). Take, for example, the entry 'sects'. In the first (and in the second edition too) of *RGG*, we find the author Köhler pointing to the statistical increase in the importance of sects and explaining it as an inevitable reaction to the institution of the church and its accommodation to the world.[31] Here, we can still recognise — though in a watered-down form — the issue raised by Ernst Troeltsch: differences between types of Christian communities represent different attitudes to the world. In the third edition of *RGG*, the focus of the entry has been narrowed still further. Now Christian sects are presented as marginal and as disturbing the unity of the church. No word about the sect being a social form of its own with a different but genuine attitude to the word, equal to the church. By the time that this kind of Christian social form became popular again, in the 1970s and 1980s, the established notion of sect could no longer be used to represent this phenomenon. This led the media to introduce the term 'fundamentalism' — which conveyed the message that fundamentalists were backward and uneducated people, not part of the modern world or genuine Christianity either.

Sects and their return as fundamentalisms, challenging the belief in progress

The astonishing career of 'fundamentalism' has triggered a wave of scholarly studies, which peaked in the years 1989-90. When historians of religion undertook more detailed research into 'fundamentalisms', they already knew that the notion was misleading. Though the practice of defining genuine Christianity in terms of fundamental doctrines was important to these groups,[32] the notion covered neither the entire range of their concerns nor even the most important one. Moreover, it mistak-

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[31] Köhler, "Sekten: I. Dogmengeschichtlich." *RGG* 5. Bd. Tübingen 1913, pp. 569-575.

[32] In 1910 the General Assembly of the Presbyterians adopted a five point declaration, containing the following essential doctrines: "the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, the atonement of Christ, the resurrection of Christ and the miracle-working power of Christ" (Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism. British*

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enly emphasised doctrine and neglected the importance of millenarian expectation when, in fact, the latter was the more important. In other words, it was millenarianism, as E.R. Sandeen observes, "which gave life and shape to the Fundamentalist movement."[33] The fundamentalist view of history, then, was part of a surprising renewal of millenarianism in the nineteenth and twentieth century.[34] This is surprising because millenarianism had lost its reputation among educated people after the devastating civil wars of the seventeenth century. However, the failure of the French Revolution, together with a loss of faith in reason, had allowed millenarianism to flourish again; and during the first period of industrialisation in Germany as well as in England, millenarian Protestant sects grew like wildfire.[35] American Protestants adopted the doctrines of John Nelson Darby (1800-1892), who taught that the millennium would begin suddenly with the rapture of true believers. Afterwards, the great tribulation would come, together with the ascendancy of the Antichrist. Premillennialism, as this scenario is called, enjoyed a popularity in the twentieth century that was not confined to fundamentalist sects. One source of evidence for this is Hal Lindsey and C.C. Carlson's *The Late Planet Earth* (1970),[36] which takes the threat of a nuclear war and the restoration of Israel as fulfillments of biblical prophecies. The apocalyptic clock is ticking again, the final battle at Armageddon in Palestine is at hand.

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and American Millenarianism 1800-1930. Chicago 1970, pp. 250-251). There were other declarations with more than five points.

[33] Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* p. XV.

[34] We owe a history of the ideas of messianic revolution in the West during the entire second millennium to David S. Katz/Richard H. Popkin, *Messianic Revolution. Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millennium.* New York 1999.

[35] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries.* New York 1959, chapter VIII; Lucian Hölscher, *Weltgericht oder Revolution. Protestantische und sozialistische Zukunftsvorstellungen im deutschen Kaiserreich.* Stuttgart 1989, pp. 74-134.

[36] This book has had a tremendous impact on spreading the conception, that a terrifying disaster is at hand, preceding final redemption. Until 1990 no less than 28 million copies have been sold.

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Let us now take a closer look at some of the research that has addressed the phenomenon of fundamentalism. Martin E. Marty's 1988 article "The Study of Protestant Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon",[37] can be seen to have inaugurated this research on a large scale. Marty conceived of the typical fundamentalist as someone who does belong to the modern world, but who fights back against it. Moreover, fundamentalism was not, according to Marty, confined to uneducated people.[38] An international research project, now complete, which Marty led together with R. Scott Appleby,[39] scrutinised fundamentalist movements in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism in an attempt to address such questions — in particular, the question of fundamentalists to the modern world. A crucial distinction between 'modernity' and 'modernism' was introduced into the study of fundamentalism in a detailed examination of the subject by Bruce Lawrence. "*Modernity*," according to Lawrence, "is the emergence of a new index of human life shaped, above all, by increasing bureaucratization and rationalization as well as technical capacities and global exchange unthinkable in the premodern era. *Modernism*," on the other hand, "is the search for individual autonomy driven by a set of socially encoded

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[37] Martin E. Marty, "Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon." *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 42 (1988) pp. 15-29.

[38] Marty characterized fundamentalists as people perceiving the threats of the modern world, that engage in retrieving certain fundamentals, select them according to their scandalous character, form an exclusive movement, support a dualistic world view, regard relativism and pluralism as their enemies, reject the idea of progress and belief in an imminent end of history.

[39] The project has resulted in five impressive volumes, published with Chicago University Press. They contain a huge amount of information about religions in the modern world. Martin E. Marty/R. Scott Appleby (ed.), *Fundamentalisms Observed.* Vol. 1, 1991; *Fundamentalisms and Society*. Vol. 2, 1993; *Fundamentalisms and the State*, Vol. 3, 1993; *Accounting for Fundamentalisms*. Vol. 4, 1994; *Fundamentalisms Comprehended.* Vol. 5, 1995. The editors have also published some of the results in a small paperback entitled *The Glory and the Power. The Fundamentalist Challenge to the Modern World.* Boston 1992. German translation: *Herausforderung Fundamentalismus. Radikale Christen, Moslems und Juden im Kampf gegen die Moderne*. Frankfurt 1996.

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values emphasizing change over continuity; quantity over quality; efficient production, power, and profit over sympathy for traditional values or vocations, in both the public and private spheres."[40] Fundamentalists, on this view, participate in modernity but resist paying tribute to the spirit of modernism.

The fundamentalist movement has also received a sociological explanation, in Martin Riesebrodt's study *Pious Passion*.[41] In the United States, Riesebrodt pointed out, fundamentalists belong mainly to the white Protestant Anglo-Saxon middle class, which was once proud of its particular ethos. For this group, hard work, diligence, modesty, chastity, and frugality were the will of God. But with industrialisation, bureaucratisation, urbanisation, and science, all of these virtues lost their high status. With this loss, the Protestant group disintegrated into factions, each with different visions of the future — liberal Protestants believing in a gradual transition from the present world to the kingdom of God through improving social conditions, fundamentalists rejecting any optimistic conception of the future. On the latter view, the rise of modern society was necessarily accompanied by an apostasy from Christian ethics and would inevitably end in disaster. Fundamentalists thus offered their premillenarian scenario as a challenge to the liberal belief in progress and in established communities of genuine believers. With the rise of fundamentalism and the consequent desire of scholars of religion to understand it better, the study of sects which rejected the world yet still remained immensely popular returned to religious studies.

The reappraisal of apocalypticism during the twentieth century affected even philosophers, as demonstrated by a famous debate between Karl Löwith and Hans Blumenberg. In his stimulating *Meaning in*

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[40] Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God. The Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age*. San Francisco 1989 p. 27.

[41] Martin Riesebrodt: *Fundamentalismus als patriarchalische Protestbewegung. Amerikanische Protestanten (1910-28) und Iranische Schiiten (1961-1979) im Vergleich*. Tübingen 1990. Engl. Translation: *Pious Passion. The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran*. Berkeley 1993.

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History, Karl Löwith traced the belief in progress to biblical eschatology.[42] Löwith's evidence that such a secularization took place was compelling. But did this form of secularization entail a complete secularization of biblical belief? Hans Blumenberg rejected Löwith's claim and initiated a debate on this issue, which is still going on today.[43] According to Blumenberg, apocalypticism and the belief in progress have different roots. The former was a specific response to the rise of science and technology that began in the eighteenth century, and presented an image of the future as an open space to be gradually filled in by predictable developments. Apparently, however, religious expectations of a millennium did not vanish with this belief, but coexisted with a secular idea of progress. There is no real contradiction here, since such expectations point to an existential problem, to the question of the meaning of life. As such, neither understanding of history can replace the other. Although Blumenberg might have underestimated the interrelation between the two kinds of expectations,[44] he explained rather convincingly why people living in a scientific-industrial world have reasons to hold fast to an apocalyptic scenario. The tradition has a distinct place in the modern world. Scholars of religions likewise have grasped, that the meaning of past religious traditions cannot be determined without their present resonance.

Mysticism and its return as esotericism, challenging the belief in a rational mastering of nature

A case similar to 'Fundamentalism' is 'New Age'. Let us return once more to the *RGG*, this time to examine the entry for 'mysticism'. In the first edition of *RGG*, published in 1910, a special subsection

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[42] Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*. Chicago 1949. German version: *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen. Die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie* 5.ed. Stuttgart 1967, pp. 11-12.

[43] Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*. Frankfurt 1966, pp. 25-42. Malcolm Bull deals with that debate in his introduction to *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World*. Oxford 1995, pp. 1-17.

[44] The point of M. Bull o.c.

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entitled 'New Mysticism'[45] described contemporary attempts to reassess mysticism. The author of the entry emphasized that the movement was a new one, inspired by Friedrich Schleiermacher, by the natural philosophy of G.T. Fechner, and by Buddhism. Adherents of this form of mysticism made use of the mystical texts published by Eugen Diederichs, which bore witness to an ancient religious tradition, and which spoke to them of an inner experience that revealed the human self's divine essence, higher than any authority. The movement hoped to empower the individual to resist rationality and materialism by reconfirming a religious tradition.[46] This 'New Mysticism' subentry reappeared in the second edition of *RGG*, published in 1930, where the author now celebrated Rainer Maria Rilke's *Stundenbuch* (1906) as the perfection of a new mysticism,[47] yet avoided any reference to the cultural and political significance that mysticism had in Germany at the end of 1920s. The 'New Mysticism' subentry is still present in the third edition of *RGG*, published in 1960, but now refers to the revival of mysticism about 1900! Apparently the two World Wars and the dominance of political concerns have made this type of religion a private matter without public claims; no allusion is made to mysticism as a social form of Christianity, with a long history and great public resonance. No attempt was made at imagining a past Christian practice as relevant to the present world.

In the 1960s, however, the assessment of the mystical tradition began to change again. People in the West began tapping heterodox and pagan traditions to achieve a new kind of religiosity: one that involved goddess worship, magic, witchcraft, astrology, and prophecy. The media that spread these ideas were bookstores, therapies, seminars, and

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[45] W. Hoffmann, "Mystik": III. "Neue Mystik." *RGG* Vol. 4. Tübingen 1913, pp. 608-612.

[46] Gangolf Hübinger, "Kulturkritik und Kulturpolitik des Eugen-Diederichs-Verlags im Wilhelminismus. Auswege aus der Krise der Moderne?" In: H. Renz/F.W. Graf (eds.), *Umstrittene Moderne*. Troeltsch-Studien 4. Gütersloh 1987 pp. 92-114; idem (ed.), *Versammlungsort moderner Geister. Der Eugen Diederichs Verlag — Aufbruch ins Jahrhundert der Extreme*. Munich 1996.

[47] RGG[2], Vol. 4, Tübingen 1930, p. 358.

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music. Since the groups concerned did not have prior ties to a church, sociologists of religion referred to them as 'cults' to distinguish them from 'sects'.[48] The notion of 'cult' had a clear genealogy, its roots lying in a kind of 'cultural translation' of Troeltsch's third category in the group consisting of 'church', 'sect', and 'mysticism'.[49] While Troeltsch conceived of 'mysticism' as an expression of genuine individuality, which rejected both community and the culture of rationalism, American scholars severed the connection between the rejection of a dominant culture and genuine individuality, since the former could be an activity of an entire group. As a consequence, Troeltsch's notion of 'mysticism' disintegrated: into personal mystical religions, on the one hand, and deviant religious communities, on the other. This disintegration created a new problem: how to describe the guiding idea of 'cults'? The English scholar Colin Campbell presented a solution: "Given that cultic groups have a tendency to be ephemeral and highly unstable, it is a fact that new ones are being born just as fast as the old ones die. There is a continual process of cult formation and collapse which parallels the high turnover of membership at the individual level. Clearly, therefore, cults must exist within a milieu which, if not conducive to the maintenance of individual cults, is clearly highly conducive to the spawning of cults in general."[50] The religious milieu of cult members is thus accorded greater importance than the guiding ideas of the various cults.

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[48] "When a sect breaks away from a church, it takes with it the label 'religion'. But cults are not born with the religious label attached:" Rodney Stark/William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion. Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation.* Berkeley 1985, p. 34.

[49] Colin Campbell, "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization". *Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5 (1972) pp. 119-136; cf. Hubert Knoblauch, "Das unsichtbare Zeitalter. 'New Age', privatisierte Religion und kultisches Milieu." *KZSS* 41 (1989) pp. 504-525 on pp. 511-513; Hubert Knoblauch, *Die Welt der Wünschelrutengänger und Pendler. Erkundungen einer verborgenen Wirklichkeit.* Frankfurt/New York 1991, pp. 29-30.

[50] C. Campbell, "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization" pp. 121-122.

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One significant element of this phenomenon — 'New Age' — began to receive serious scholarly attention, for which the years 1994-96 were decisive. These years saw the appearance of three monographs that analysed this elusive phenomenon, which resembled 'fundamentalism' insofar as 'New Age', too, was a fashionable label spread by the media and publishers. The German scholar Christoph Bochinger traced the rise of this popular label, showing how it subsumed many distinct phenomena. For this reason, his book is a comprehensive treatment of the entire range of 'New Age' themes.[51] Paul Helaas, in his *New Age Movement*, sought to reduce the variety of beliefs and practices that 'New Age' represented by claiming the existence of a kind of guiding idea behind these beliefs and practices: a concept of the human self transcending the power of tradition.[52] 'Detraditionalization' is the key notion in his approach. It also became the title of a collection of essays that he edited by well-known scholars of religious and social studies.[53] The beliefs and practices of New Age serve in an attempt to liberate the self from the power of a tradition that has separated mind and matter, subject and object, individual and nature. 'New Age' is a distinctly modern phenomenon, accelerating the fall of traditional man. Though Helaas presents a strong thesis, one element remains mysterious: where does the notion of a self transcending the power of the traditional world come from? Helaas appears to have ignored the studies, whose numbers and arguments are substantial, that have traced the modern concept of the self to religious sources.[54]

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[51] Christoph Bochinger, *'New Age' und moderne Religion. Religionswissenschaftliche Analysen*. Gütersloh, 2. ed. 1995.

[52] Paul Helaas, *The New Age Movement. The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity*. Oxford 1996.

[53] Paul Helaas/Scott Lash/Paul Morris (eds.), *Detraditionalization. Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity*. Oxford 1996.

[54] I restrict myself to some titles only: Richard A. Shweder/Robert A. LeVine (eds.), *Culture Theory. Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*. Cambridge 1984 (in the tradition of George Herbert Mead); Michael Carrither/Steven Collins/Steven Lukes, *The Category of the Person. Anthropology, Philosophy, History*. Cambridge 1985 (containing in translation the seminal article by Marcel Mauss "A Category of the

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Doubts about the interpretation of 'New Age' as detraditionalization were lent additional credence when 'New Age' was linked to esotericism. Antoine Faivre presented 'esotericism' as an old philosophy of nature, having a long tradition, which originated in ancient culture, particularly in Alexandrian Hermetism and was handed down through Western culture to our own. Faivre conceived of it as a particular 'form of thought'[55] that sees correspondences between all of the parts of the universe. As Faivre writes: "It is the imagination that allows the use of these intermediaries, symbols and images to develop a gnosis, to penetrate the hieroglyphs of Nature, to put the theory of correspondences into active practice and to uncover, to see, and to know the mediating entities between Nature and the divine world."[56] The Dutch scholar Wouter Hanegraaff took the logical next step of identifying 'New Age' as an offshoot of that tradition.[57] What at first sight appeared to be a label subsuming rather diverse elements now displayed much more coherence: 'holism' was the guiding principle. This interpretation readily explained why 'New Age' had benefited from modern theoretical physics and biology in its conception of life and the cosmos as a system that, like a bicycle rider, has to keep restoring its balance. The principle of 'New Age' is this one: spirit is the dynamic of a system keeping itself alive, and matter and spirit cannot be separated.[58] Hanegraaff's

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Human Mind: The Notion of Person, the Notion of Self" (pp. 1-25); Hans G. Kippenberg/Yme B. Kuiper/Andy F. Sanders (eds.), *Concepts of Person in Religion and Thought*. Berlin/New York 1990; Louis Dumont, *Essais sur l'Individualisme. Une perspective anthropologique sur l'idéologie moderne*. Paris 1983; Albert Baumgarten (with Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa) (ed.), *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*. Leiden 1998.

[55] Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism.* New York 1994, pp. 10-15.

[56] Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* p. 12.

[57] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture. Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*. Leiden 1996. "The term 'New Age Science' is actually a misnomer: its real domain is not natural science, but *philosophy of nature*" (p. 64).

[58] Hubert Knoblauch, " 'New Paradigm' oder 'Neues Zeitalter'? Fritjof Capras moralisches Unternehmen und die 'New-Age-Bewegung'," in: J. Bergmann/A. Hahn/Th. Luckmann (eds.), *Religion und Kultur*. Opladen 1993, pp. 249-270.

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approach allowed the various practices associated with 'New Age' to be seen as having unity. Take, for example, the distinction between disease and illness and between curing and healing. "Diseases are biophysical conditions, and medical practitioners are concerned with curing these conditions. Illness, in contrast, has to do with the 'complex social, psychological, and spiritual condition of the sick person', and constitutes the proper domain of healing."[59] Illness is no longer attributed to mainly organic failure, which requires medical treatment. It is result of a mistaken understanding of one's own life. 'Difficult times' deserve a reflection, which relates the person and his or her body to cosmic life and rhythm again. When illness, divorce or unemployment are dealt with properly, they can be turned into stages of an 'authentic' life. 'Esotericism' in this sense has become part of the biography of people today.[60]

Inquiry into modern 'cults' confirms the conclusion we draw from 'fundamentalism'. Since the third and fourth decade of the twentieth century, the perception that religions continued to hold power in modern times had disappeared. If we replace 'fundamentalism' by Weber's 'sect', or 'New Age' by Buber's 'mysticism', we suddenly rediscover a theory assuming a significance of certain religious traditions for inhabitants of the modern world.

Disenchantment as a challenge to imagination

It is worth mentioning that Weber developed a model to explain the new career of religions in the modern age. It was part of a discovery that he made in 1911. At that time, according to his wife Marianne, Weber began a fresh, intense study of world religions. He discovered not only that the modern economic ethos had had its origin in religious belief, but that religious rationalism had permeated the entire fabric of Western culture. Weber's key term was 'disenchantment', which indicated the long historical process of rationalization that preceded

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[59] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture* pp. 42-43.

[60] Cf. Horst Stenger, *Die soziale Konstruktion okkulter Wirklichkeit. Eine Soziologie des "New Age"*. Opladen 1993, pp. 139-245.

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the modern age and had its origins in ancient religious belief. This development was fuelled by the problem of theodicee, which served to explain, justify, and even codify a permanent incongruence between fate and merit, and between fact and meaning.[61] As a consequence, the world was devalued — a precondition for a rational attitude to a world governed by its own laws and devoid of any inherent meaning.[62] Weber's discovery implied a reassessment of mysticism — a marginal phenomenon in his study of the Protestant ethos of capitalism which now assumed great importance. In describing her husband's discovery, Marianne Weber speaks of two trends fundamental to the history of mankind: "On the one hand, a rational control of the world and on the other hand, the mystical experience."[63] In Weber's own words (from his introduction to the "Economic Ethic of the World Religions"): "The unity of the primitive image of the world, in which everything was concrete magic, has tended to split into rational cognition and mastery of nature, on the one hand, and into 'mystic' experiences on the other. The inexpressible contents of such experiences remain the only possible 'beyond', added to the mechanism of a world robbed of Gods."[64] In 1913, Weber developed a systematic reconstruction of these trends, that was published posthumously by Marianne Weber as the chapter "Sociology of Religion" in *Economy and Society*. In this work, Weber sketched a universal historical drama leading to different principles for leading one's life. The process of the

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[61] These theodicees differed in their explanations. Weber regarded only three of them as rationally sufficient: the Indian doctrine of the transmigration of the soul, the Zoroastrian dualism, and the Protestant doctrine of predestination by a deus absconditus. Cf. Max Weber, *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen. Konfuzianismus und Taoismus* (1915-1920), ed. by H. Schmidt-Glintzer. MWG I/19. Tübingen 1989 pp. 246, 520-22; Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*. Translated by Ephraim Fischoff. Boston 1991, pp. 138-150.

[62] M. Weber, *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen. Konfuzianismus und Taoismus* p. 515.

[63] Marianne Weber, *Max Weber. Ein Lebensbild*. Tübingen 1926 pp. 348-349.

[64] Hans H. Gerth/C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Oxford 1946 p. 282.

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world's 'disenchantment' was accelerated by prophets, by particular social classes and historical conditions, and by intellectuals. Weber's concept of 'disenchantment', often understood as a universal category of historical evolution, embeds an often overlooked theory of how religions are transformed in the modern world. This theory is as follows: "As intellectualism suppresses belief in magic, the world's processes become disenchanted, lose their magical significance, and henceforth simply 'are' and 'happen' but no longer signify anything. As a consequence, there is a growing demand that the world and the total pattern of life be subject to an order that is significant and meaningful."[65]

We are back, then, where we started: with the issue of imagination. Weber recognised the necessity to identify specific categories determining modern receptions of religious traditions. The significance of past religions has been deeply affected by the process of 'disenchantment'. Religious history has become a major source of meaning in a world increasingly regarded as devoid of it. Weber returned to the link between the world's 'disenchantment' and religiosity's new rise in a still fascinating public lecture, "Science as Profession", delivered in 1917 in Munich. In this lecture, Weber argued that even science is the product of religious history: it depends on a belief "that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed."[66] Weber pointed out that because of the dominance of a calculating attitude to the world, religions had definitely "retreated from public life: either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations."[67] Yet Weber's own words betray some doubt about the success of rationality. Indeed, the belief in

[65] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* p. 125.

[66] Hans H. Gerth/C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber* p. 139.

[67] Hans H. Gerth/C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber* p. 155.

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controlling the world never entirely dominated scholarly or public discourse nor did it remain unchallenged. On the contrary, the careers of sects and of mysticism, of fundamentalism and New Age, of apocalyptic views of history and of esoteric conceptions of man and nature: all of these have relied on scientific and public discourse, rejecting too bold claims. Doubts are the thread that winds through the stories of fundamentalism and esotericism, and those of sects and mysticism. The experience of disenchantment has displaced religious history. We need revised concepts of 'history' and 'tradition' in order to understand the religious history of the past century.

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